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DECORATIVE ART IN LONDON.

BY HENRY B. WHEATLEY.

WHEN Thomas Hope wrote, at the beginning of the present century, a book on Household Furniture, his friends laughed at him and dubbed him "Furniture Hope." He was only before his time, and had he lived now, nothing would have seemed more natural than that a Meeenas such as he was, should devote himself to the improvement of "Art in the House." Teachers arise on all sides, and there are plenty of artists ready to supply this demand for tasteful things. It is somewhat strange that we are now imitating much of the work which Hope tried to supersede, and it might be as well if some of our designers turned to Hope's book, which was mainly drawn from ancient sources, instead of worshipping so exclusively at the shrines of Chippendale and Sheraton. Mr. P. H. Calderon, the Royal Academician, gave some excellent advice last month, in an address which he delivered to the students at the St. Martin's School of Art. The gist of his remarks can be put in these few words, "Be original, eschew affectation." It is a mere commonplace to say that a copyist is not an artist, and yet on all sides we are shown mere copies and asked to admire them as the results of art. Mr. Calderon spoke out boldly about one of the idols of the present day. He said, "within the last twenty years the influence of Botticelli has come amongst us as a sort of poison." He admired the man, and he admired his work, but he did not admire the pictures of consumptive, long-necked creatures, with long hair, fit subjects for the hospitals," which his modern copyists flooded us with. Mr. Edis also gave a lecture last month on the Artistic Treatment of Furniture, and spoke a word for common-sense and against eccentricity. I fear, however, that some of his suggestions would be found expensive if carried out, such as having original designs of figures for the walls, in place of the ordinary block-printed papers. To those who can afford such decoration, it is a suggestion that should commend itself. Occasionally in old houses we find charming figures of birds painted upon the panelled walls, and the rich would do well to employ good artists to follow this good old fashion.

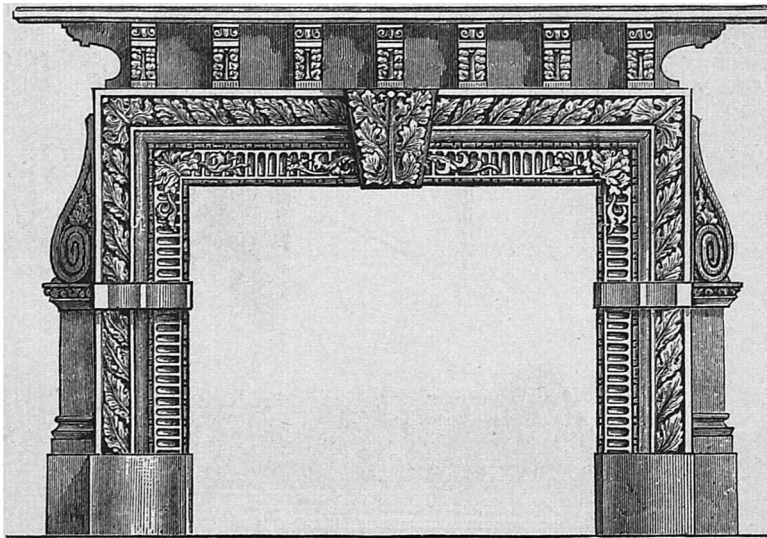
A third Furniture Exhibition is to be held shortly at that home of exhibitions, the Agricultural Hall, and it is expected to be superior to the two which have preceded it. Many of the chief Continental firms propose to exhibit, and a fine show will probably be the result. Besides cabinet and upholstered furniture, horticultural appliances, kitchen and laundry utensils, carpets, curtains, china and glass will all be well represented. The machinery in motion is to form a special feature of the exhibition. Carpet looms from Kidderminster and others from Turkey are promised. Ivory carving, button making, fret cutting, fringe making, Benares brass working, Swiss wood carving and several other trades, are to be shown in daily operation.

Furniture and objects for the use of dwellings are to be shown in one of the nine sections of the Calcutta International Exhibition, to be held next December. Another of the sections is to be devoted to the work of children. We most of us learn more by our failures than by our successes, and I suppose every collector has been duped at some time or other. Deception is everywhere around us, and the trade in modern antiques is flourishing. Old bits of oak are roughly carved and turned into pieces of furniture. Collectors travel into Holland and Belgium, and buy at high prices fabricated cabinets that have been placed in their way, so true is it in all cases that the demand creates the supply. But here a true artistic taste will stand the collector in good stead, for these modern manufacturers are usually execrable in design and exceedingly ill-adjusted in their fittings. If we buy a thing regardless of its merits merely because we believe it to be old, we deserve to be deceived.

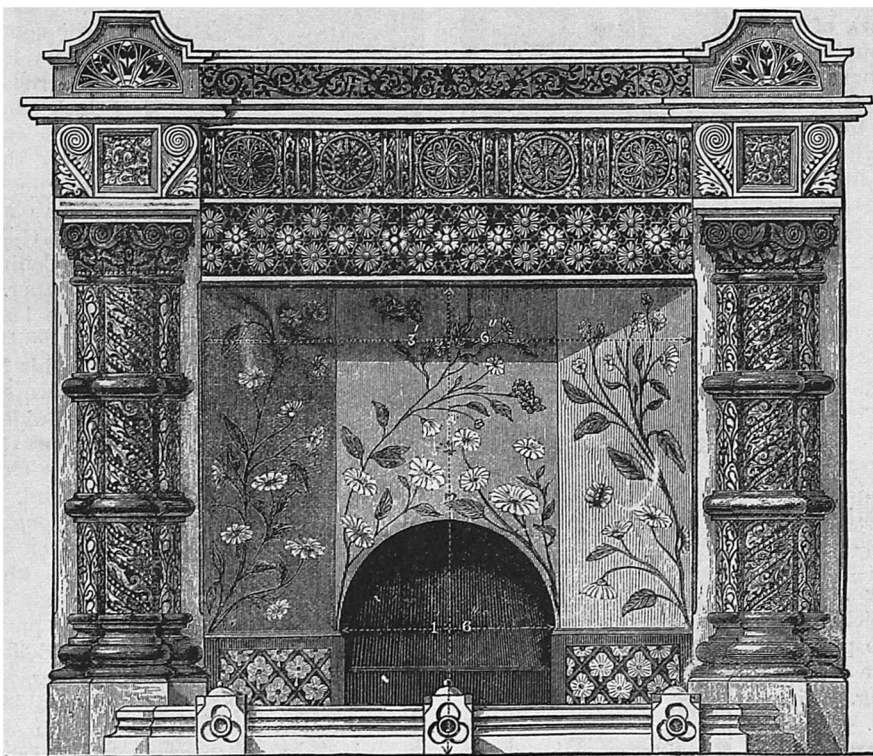
I have just now alluded to the injury mere copies do to art, but of course while the artist is studying he must copy the noble works of the

past masters of his art, and therefore the authorities of the University of Oxford have done well in taking steps for the collection of a series of casts of antique art. Lord Elgin had to suffer from some obloquy when he brought to England the statues from the frieze of the Parthenon, but if he had left them in Greece not one would remain now to tell of the consummate skill of Pheidias. How much the sight of the Elgin marbles has done for the revival of English art it would be impossible to guess, but that it has done very much we cannot for a moment doubt.

I have in former letters given some particulars of the beauty of our new Law Courts. Since then they have begun to be used, and we now hear some murmurings from those who use them. Several judges complain of the defective acoustical proper-



ties of their courts. They can't hear what is going on inside, and they hear too well what is going on outside. A jury complained of a draught, and a judge said he could not see counsel because his desk was so high, and he could not hear him because he was so far away. There may not be much in all this, but we must allow that architects are rather too apt to sacrifice utility to effect. The removal of the old courts at Westminster will be a great gain, and we are all looking forward to seeing the side of William Rufus's glorious hall set free from the excrescences that have so long hidden it from view. There is reason to fear that a very extensive system of reparation will be necessary for the Abbey close by, in fact experts say that nothing less than an entirely new stone covering will be sufficient.



Although mural painting is one of the earliest of the decorative arts, we have still much to learn as to the most suitable designs and the best medium which should be used. Many of our wall paintings have been disastrous failures, and many good designs about the country have positively peeled off the walls upon which they had been placed. Sometimes the designs are inappropriate to their position, and the more attention that is paid to this branch of painting the better for English art. In 1781 John Stock bequeathed funds to the Society of Arts for the promotion of "Drawing, Sculpture and Architecture," and the council offer for the present a gold medal or £20 for the best

design from a poem, or from history, or from the Scriptures, prepared with a view to mural decoration.

We hear much of the bad taste of painting and graining wood instead of allowing the true material to appear, but it will probably be long before paint is dispensed with in our houses. I am not prepared to agree with those who denounce paint as a deception antagonistic to the true spirit of art, but I have a very vivid recollection of the delightful appearance of a friend's house where all the walls and ceilings were covered with polished pine. I think, therefore, we ought to welcome any process by which we may obtain ornamental wood free from the clogging properties of paint. Mr. J. Cowan, of Liverpool, has taken a forward step in this direction by producing what he calls hydrographic wood carving. This can be used on woods which will look well without the addition of any paint. The process is as follows: The operator uses dies of any suitable pattern, and impresses them upon the wood to be ornamented, somewhat after the method adopted for striking metals. These compress the fibre in those places which come under the pressure of the die, and leave a fac-simile in intaglio of the design. The depth of the impression can be regulated as required. By means of a plane the surface of the wood is next completely smoothed until it presents a level surface. The wood is next subjected to the action of hot water or steam. In two or three minutes those parts where the fibre has been pressed swell up, and the design is reproduced in strong relief. I have several specimens of the work now before me, some of which would make admirable ornamental beadings. The inventor has almost perfected the necessary machinery.

Messrs. Doulton have long been well-known for the excellence of their glazed ware closed stoves, but they have now taken a new departure in the production of open fire-places made entirely of a ceramic material, and in which no iron, except the fire bars, is introduced. A special exhibition of these stoves has been opened in Conduit Street, and I there saw the other day, one of them in use and the effect of the cleanly as well as beautiful material, is much to be commended, and I send you two specimens from the exhibit, so that you may see the quality of their work. I may mention in connection with this subject that the report of the Smoke Abatement Committee of 1882, has just been published in a portly volume full of illustrations. I may perhaps have an opportunity in a future letter of alluding to the contents of this report.

Those who have watched the progress of gas lighting will not be surprised to hear of the many improvements that have been made of late years in emulation of the principles of the dangerous rival, electricity, but the majority of persons will see much cause to wonder when they visit the International Gas and Electric Lighting Exhibition at the Crystal Palace. Much attention is being paid to the incandescent form of gas burning, and Mr. Lewis's incandescent light is spoken highly of. Instead of the ordinary burner being fixed to the gas fitting, a cap or thimble of finely woven platinum wire is substituted, and the air is introduced under pressure. When lighted and the air introduced a flickering blue flame is seen for a moment, but this quickly disappears leaving the platinum cap an incandescent mass.

I have left to the end of my letter an allusion to a most important question, which though it is not an artistic one, lies at the root of our home comfort—that is the sanitary inspection of houses. It is of little use to ornament our homes if they are radically unhealthy, and yet this

is being done every day. It takes a long time to educate the public in this matter, but several societies are at work, and these proceedings are evidently having an effect. Mr. W. K. Burton, Engineer to the Sanitary Protective Society, read a paper last month before the Society of Arts in which he gave the result of a series of inspections, which, broadly stated, is that in London only one drain in a thousand is in proper sanitary condition. Mr. Rogers Field went further, and said in the discussion that followed the reading of the paper, that though he had been testing drains for the last eight or ten years, he had only found three sound ones.